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French publications on foreign social protection systems in the Revue Française des Affaires Sociales : a series of articles, from 1946 to 2005

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2009/38

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**French publications on foreign social protection systems in the
Revue Française des Affaires Sociales: a series of articles, from 1946 to 2005¹**

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Introduction

For several decades, the reforms relating to the social protection have been conceived, or assessed by making comparisons with the systems in other countries, either European countries or the United States. Some years ago, the French government tried to justify new reforms governing flexibility on the labour market referring to the flexicurity of Denmark (Barbier 2005). This cognitive openness to other countries originates in the process of globalisation, the need for comparison with other countries, the search for the “best practices” and, even for purposes of convergence. Such openness leads to a cognitive change in national social protection models which have often sought universal values and social rights alongside the reality of the diversity in national systems. Consequently, the comparison has prompted the adoption of more relativistic positions in the analysis of the national systems and their reforms (Palier 2002).

Whatever the doctrinal or theoretical references, all the authors concerned agree with the idea that the social welfare systems (SWS) are not only a set of rules and rights which guarantee the social security of families or individuals. SWS are equally institutions which, in a historical period, contribute to the unity of society within the state. A simple clue to this phenomenon is the steady increase in the social expenditure as a proportion of GDP for several post WWII decades. The specificity and the originality of this period are the conjunction of the value of universalism in the social sphere (everybody has a social right to social protection) and its implementation within a national framework.

In France, how do we consider the other social welfare systems? And how has our representation of them evolved? One way of answering this question is by analysing the publications on this subject from the end of WWII. In 2006, The *Revue Française des Affaires Sociales* launched a study on the articles published from 1946, according to given themes: the origin of the Review, labour, housing, health, etc. One topic was the analysis of the articles which were published on the foreign social welfare systems. This analysis was published in a special Issue of the Review (RFAS, 2006, n°4).

An analysis of the publications dealing with social protection on an international level has to distinguish two different complementary ways. The first one is the cross-country comparative methodology which analyses the different national systems, social rights, financing schemes, etc. This approach is particularly justified as regards social protection because the Treaty of Rome claimed the principle of subsidiarity, which means that social protection has to be organised and managed with a national tier. A second approach is based on the analysis of the role of international institutions such as the ILO, the OECD, the World Bank, and of course

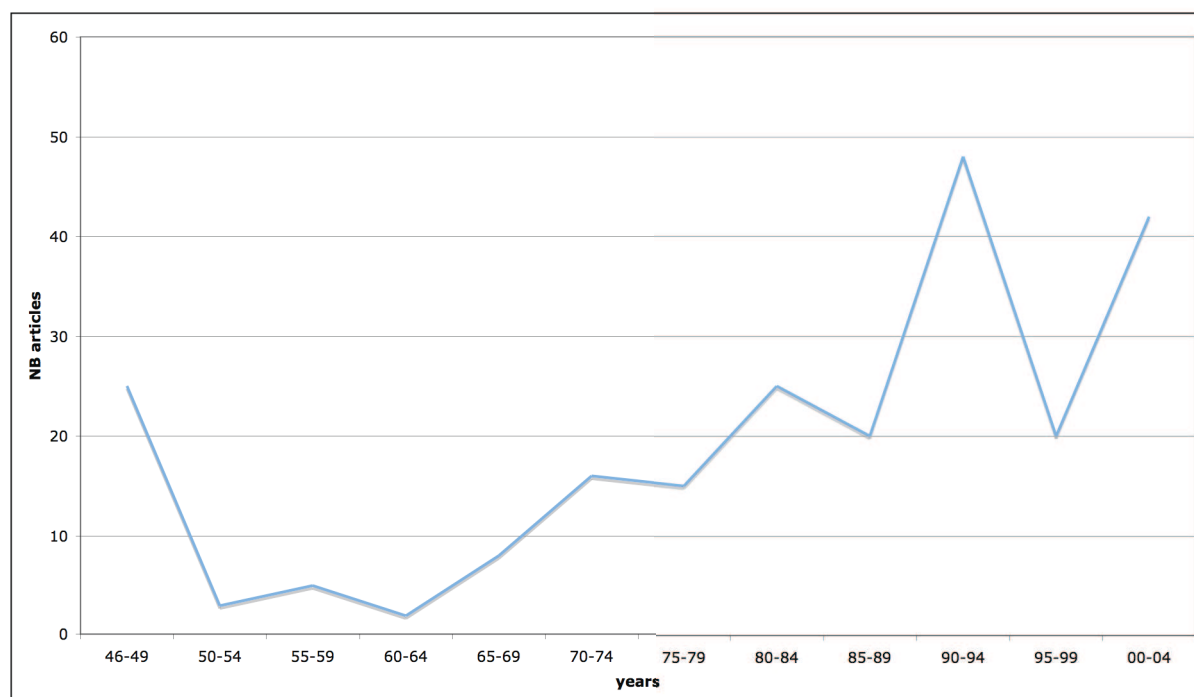
¹ A French version of the article was published in the *Revue Française des Affaires Sociales*, vol.60, n°4, October-December 2006, pp.93-120, and the *Revue Belge de Sécurité Sociale*, vol.51, n°1, January 2009, pp. 7-36, (French and Dutch).

the European Union, and their influence on national level. The European Union directly influences the national decisions through its Directives, Recommendations and other instruments. Other international bodies often indirectly modify a national situation through the weight of international standards in international trade (Chauchard, 2005, Barbier & Theret, 2004).

The *Revue Française du Travail* was created in April 1946 and came out until 1966. Then, it became the *Revue Française des Affaires Sociales*. From 1946 to 2004, the Reviews published 2050 articles. 272 articles were published on the foreign social welfare systems, i.e., more than 10 percent of the articles. These articles contain much information on foreign systems. However, our present objective is not to describe such systems but to analyse the choice of publication: What kind of countries were present in the Reviews? Which countries were ignored? What were the themes which were frequently analysed? What topics were ignored? How and when did the Reviews publish articles on the international approach to social protection? What were the variations over the 50 years period? Were the articles always written by the same authors or not? What were the objectives which guided the publication of such articles?

Before proceeding with the analysis of the articles, we have to cite two limitations to this comparative analysis. The first drawback is that we know the publication but we do not know anything about the selection process. We know nothing of the initial supply of articles and we do not know the doctrinal influence on the choice of articles. For instance, is the absence of certain countries due to the absence of articles and the absence of curiosity, or is it the consequence of a selective process? For several reasons, this difficulty cannot be addressed herewith.

A second problem in comparative analysis is the comparison between the different Reviews of different countries. In order to know how the French Review analyses the other systems, it would be useful to know how the Reviews in other countries analyse foreign systems. We have had the opportunity of comparing publication of the French Review and the *Revue Belge de Sécurité Sociale* (RBSS) which was founded in 1954 (more detailed information in Annex 1). This comparison is useful because it is the Review of a neighbouring country, French speaking (and equally published in Flemish), and with a similar historical social welfare system.

Figure 1: Number of articles on foreign social welfare systems in the RFAS

Source: Annex 2

Except in the special Issues which were to be developed after the seventies, there exists no editorial which can help us understand the publication policy of the Review. Therefore the analysis of the publication of articles will be largely based on the articles themselves and certain variables such as: the countries, the international institutions, the topics, the authors and, of course, the periods of time. The most striking feature in the articles on the foreign SWS is the cleavage between three periods over the 50 years. The first period is very short, from 1946 to 1951, a period of gestation for the *Revue Française du Travail* (RFT), which clearly reveals an intense and permanent interest in foreign countries, their systems and their reforms. The second period dates from 1952 to 1975-1980 and is characterised by a quasi absence of articles (1952-1965) followed by a slow increasing number of publications (1965-1980). Finally the third period, since 1980 has clearly published a significant number of articles on the international approach to social welfare systems.

As we will see, the structuring into three periods is not only a quantitative observation. The three periods are also characterised by specificities which will be described in the following three sections.

1- First period: 1946—1951: Curiosity of the world

The post WWII period is characterised by an interest in “others”. Pierre Laroque, one of the masterminds behind the French social security system wrote the first article in the first Issue of RFT in January 1946. Eight years later, he also wrote the first article of the *Revue Belge de Sécurité Sociale* (January 1954) in which he described the French system. As regards the early years of RFT, an analysis from Le Crom (RFAS, 2006, n°4) proves to be difficult because information is in short supply, i.e.: there exists no editorial which makes it possible to understand the strategy underpinning the publications and, the authors of the articles are often unknown. On the other hand, it is obvious that RFT abides by a real policy towards publication covering foreign systems and this involves clear choices of topics while displaying an international vision of the relevant countries.

1-1 A publication policy

The large number of articles on international approaches to social welfare systems is not the result of a special Issue on them but it is due to a clear thirst for information in almost all the Issues. The framework for each Issue is always as follows. The first section of the Issue contains certain articles which are signed by their authors. After this section, the articles are divided into several items:

- *Social activity in France*
- *Social activity in the international bodies*
- *Social activity abroad*
- *Statistics.*

Two items thus focus on 'international' dimension. The first item provides the ILO newsbrief but it is subsequently to decline and become an occasional item. After 1951, it disappears altogether.

The international social activity item focuses on one country. For instance the table of contents of Issue 9 (1946) is as follows:

- *USA: La grève maritime*
- *Grande Bretagne: Le placement des travailleurs intellectuels*
- *Australie: La sécurité sociale*
- *Yougoslavie: Le nouvelle loi sur les assurances sociales*

The Review mainly provides one piece of information on a single country but it is the current affairs of that country that are given importance rather than the topic itself. Such knowledge is clearly the result of publishing policy defined by certain key persons in the Review and who are not identified. However the reason underlying the choice of one country largely remains a mystery. We can suppose that the editorial board seeking out those countries in the process of building new social security systems. For instance, Issue 12 of 1947 publishes the '*Plan de sécurité économique et sociale* of Uruguay: 'In 1946, The Uruguayan socialist party laid down a large scale plan for the economic development of the country based on totally new principles' (p.298). In January 1947, an article appeared on New Zealand. What were the reasons of this choice? Without any explicit explanation we can uncover certain intellectual or political reasons. The post WWII period contains international references because the members of the Review now possess a culture which embraces the world (Le Crom, 2006) and the founders of the French social security system are more familiar with foreign systems; some of them know the books of Beveridge (Kerschen, 1995, p.127). Finally, the idea of universalism which is more or less the cornerstone of social welfare systems, prompts all the policy makers to look abroad and to analyse other systems.

However, the reasons for choosing the countries, in 1946, appear to be inconsistent and we can find suggestions of an internal debate in a very rare and short editorial in Issue 21 (December 1947) which claims that the item on the international matters will be called '*Le mois social dans le monde*'. Several features can be highlighted:

- the reference to the world and not the European area;
- the articles have become very short (one page) and mainly provide the recent news on developments in employment and wages.

The editorial also hints at that the uneven quality of the previous articles, the difficulty in obtaining information from abroad and the scant attention which the Review editors give to international news.

Finally, such an attempt at revamping the Review ends in failure and as from 1948, the Review reverts to its previous formula. However, this equally marks the onset of decline in the international formula. In May-June 1949, the international items are omitted for the first time. This specific classification of international information subsequently vanishes without any explanation and, in 1952, the publication of articles on international information disappears.

1-2 The countries in the world

The choice of country provides pertinent information on the objectives of the Review. This choice is totally different from that of today. The main features of this choice are its eclecticism and geographical diversity. On the one side, a group of countries are presented once but after this first period the Review seems to disregard them: Czechoslovakia, Uruguay, New Zealand, Portugal, Australia and Egypt. On the other side, almost all the countries most cited over the 50 years are present in the first period: Sweden, United Kingdom, Spain and Italy. But there is no mention of the United States. In Issue 21 (December 1947), '*Le mois social dans le monde*' provides recent news from the United Kingdom, the United States, South America, Canada, Turkey, Austria, Australia, Sweden, Norway, Romania and Switzerland. This list does not contain any country of the future '*Europe des six*' i.e., the countries which signed the Treaty of Rome in 1957.

Finally, it seems that the Editorial Committee is attached to the idea of the world and need to know what is happening abroad. The idea of a zone of countries is not explicit except perhaps for New Zealand and Australia. Perhaps Sweden is also considered as representative of the Nordic countries but nothing can confirm this idea. The only argument which could explain this eclectic list of countries lies in the social security bilateral agreements (RFAS, 1971, n°2): Poland (1920, 1948), Czechoslovakia (1920, 1948), Italy (1904), Luxemburg (1923, 1949), Switzerland (1933), Yugoslavia (1950). The meetings to prepare these agreements probably facilitated the presentation of articles which disseminated the knowledge of foreign countries.

1-3 Descriptive approach of the systems

A large number of the articles limit themselves to description of the rules of the systems (for example '*Les assurances sociales en Allemagne*', RFT, 1947, n°13): the description of social entitlements, the cost of the allowances and/or the rules of financing. Sometimes, this description is linked to an in-depth reform and contrasts the new system to the previous one, mainly when this reform is a consequence of a socialist victory. During this period of creation of new social welfare systems, the articles often more describe the whole system rather than a specific social benefit. The articles such as those describing the social benefits in Canada (RFT, 1947, n°14) or the NHS in the UK (RFT, 1947, n°13) are exceptional. However, even in this case, the principles which underpinned the reforms are not explained or are supposedly known by the reader. Furthermore, when we compare this period to the third one, it is obvious that the articles do not contain any reference to a model or a classification of systems such as we are familiar with today. Comparative analysis is also quite unknown and the articles are never constructed in a comparative way.

The contents of the articles are always legal or administrative. In fact they are a pure description of social rights and their financial costs. The framework of the articles encompasses a classical description which still exists in the works on social security law or in the presentation of MISSOC, for example: the field of application (beneficiaries), conditions of admittance, benefits and, sometimes the rules of financing. On the other hand the articles do not contain any information on the actual distribution of the benefits, their amount, on the

socioeconomic characteristics of the recipients and, on the real impact in the well-being of families. What is more, the notion of take-up is totally unknown to the authors.

The authors of the articles are rarely university researchers or professors. A reading of the articles reveals that the authors are mainly witnesses of events and they voluntarily choose to write in a particular style. Given the similarity of the lay-out of the articles, it can be surmised that one person has probably proposed or imposed such a way of writing. In short, many articles were probably written by executives in the Ministry for Social Affairs.

Finally, an analysis of the publication of these article shows that the main objective was a political one: an 'objective' presentation of the reforms that many developed countries created in a similar way to France. The absence of comparative analysis prevents us from understanding how they conceive the French system compared to another system and vice versa.

The objective of the articles is to provide neutral information to an elite who, through their own culture and education, are able to understand and to compare countries and systems (Le Crom, 2006).

2- Period 2: .International withdrawal (1952- 1980)

This long period could be divided into two periods, from 1952 to 1965 which is characterised by a paucity of publications and another one from 1965 to 1980 in which the number of publications slowly increased.

2-1 Causes of international withdrawal

One key illustration of the negligible desire to know about other social welfare systems or the international bodies can be found in a special Issue of RFAS published in 1976 in two tomes (603 pages), called '*Perspectives de la Sécurité Sociale*'. This Issue comprised reports by students of the *Ecole Nationale d'Administration* (ENA), a renowned school producing high-ranking civil servants. These reports study much matters as family policy, health insurances, hospital care, the harmonisation of social benefits in France, the minimum income for the elderly, the age of retirement, or the price of the pharmaceutical products. Not one chapter focuses on international Issues. In one Annex, we find a short presentation of the minimum income for the elderly in certain European countries. This is somewhat surprising, as we cannot imagine any publication today failing to refer to the international context.

The other way to highlight this withdrawal is by a comparison with the Belgian Review (RBSS). The first article of its first Issue (January 1954) was written by Laroque in which he appraised the French system. All the RBSS Issues contain the same framework as the *Revue Française du Travail* after WWII. However, the most striking difference is about the reference to the European and international bodies. The Belgian Review constantly publishes the European debates on the theme of social security in the European Community. Furthermore, another Belgian Review, the *Revue du Travail* also publishes international information on the social rights of the employees.

Why such an enormous difference of interest in the international sphere between these two French and Belgian Reviews? The first traditional explanation of the difference between both countries is that Belgium is a small country, surrounded by France, Germany and the United Kingdom, and this makes it automatically more open than a larger country and the decision-makers in Belgium were certainly more sensitive to other social security models than just the French ones. The second factor is the use of two languages in Belgium which was a reason for openness at that time. The third factor is that the organs of the European community are located in Brussels.

Why did the French Review not publish any articles on other social welfare systems in the final Issues of RTF and the new RFAS? The main reason is the lack of interest from the readers and also from the contributors to the Review. In France, following the creation of the social security system, the prime concern was the extension and harmonisation of social rights between the numerous corporatist and autonomous systems. This trend was in synergy with the new economic role of the state and the Keynesian economic policy. This valorisation of the state was also founded on French history and the power of the state in the management of the public goods.

Another explanation relates more to the Review itself and to certain limitations in previous policy. During the first period, the countries studied were dispersed, and there was no attempt at an international comparison with France for instance which probably created a reading frustration. The second limitation lies in the descriptive aspect of the papers and the absence of analysis of the official texts (laws, decrees, etc.) which prevent the reader from a real understanding of the foreign systems. This lack of interest also characterises the world of the social scientists. The subject of social protection was studied only in social law and any international comparison is quite unknown in French social sciences (Vigour, 2005).

However, the scarcity of articles does not mean a total absence. The dramatic drop in the number of published articles is combined to another phenomenon, the narrowed-down targeting of certain countries such as Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States.

2.2 The non-existence of a European Community

Since the Treaty of Rome, the free movement of the workers has been one of the four freedoms of the European Community. The 6 founding member states of the Community conceived a policy of harmonisation in social welfare systems (Chassard 1992), but which remained an internal activity in the Commission without any external expertise. In fact, the researchers were not mobilised in relation to this topic.

Despite this paucity of articles, two key exceptions have to be highlighted. In 1965, two series of articles were published in two Issues of RFT, on the relations between the Social security bodies and the medical profession. In RTF (1965, n°1 and n°3), provided information on five countries: France, the Netherlands, and the Republic of Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy and Luxemburg. These publications were the result of a collaboration between several Ministries for Social Affairs. With the assistance of the *Cercle des Alumni* and the University Foundation of Brussels, M. Delprée, the General Secretary of the Belgian Ministry of Social Affairs held a series of conferences in 1964 and in early 1965. The objective was to forge a system of networking between the administrations by means of national presentations delivered by national experts.

The second feature is that the compiled publications focus on one management issue rather than a general description of the national systems. According to A. Barjot, general director of the department of social security at the French Ministry of Labour, the origin of the Conference is the conflict between the state, the social security bodies and the physicians in Belgium. The objective of the conference was to compare the different national processes and, implicitly, to find the best practices and to extend them to all member states.

However, there remains one similarity with the first period and this concerns the authors themselves. This era is characterised by the belief in the synergy between the economic and the social development in which worker protection is the basis of both individual and collective well-being. Almost all the key speakers and authors of the articles happen to be high level executives in the Ministries for Social Affairs and are not university researchers. This endows them with a specific style: institutional, descriptive of rules, embodying positive values, void of any criticism of any system and keeping out of any comparative analysis.

The third main characteristic is the reference to the European Community. The rule governing social protection is the principle of subsidiarity, which means that the European bodies have not any legal competency in the social security domain. However, we note that the countries studied in the RFAS articles are from the European Community and this now includes United Kingdom, which represent a complete change in comparison with the first period.

In the fourth place, the approach initially appears as a comparative one and we can easily imagine that many informal discussions focused on the respective advantages and inconveniences of each national system. However these discussions are not included in the documents. Probably the reluctance to criticize any other system in official papers means the absence of a real cross-country comparison. Only A. Barjot, attempts to compare the French and Belgian situations. Finally, the publications resemble a reciprocal exchange of information between the European countries: 'the better the knowledge of Europe is, the easier the united Europe will be' (Carapezza, 1965). The subject of the medical profession is again studied in another article in 1967. Doctor Forget (1967) describes the European directives which guarantee the freedom of installation and the gradual lifting of national restrictions which prevent physicians from setting themselves up in countries of their choice.

Another exception is the publication of the papers of a Conference to mark the 25th year of existence of the social security in France. (RFAS, 1971, n°2). This Issue contains two very interesting articles on social security systems from both an international and European perspective. The first article is written by Lagrave and describes the '*Sécurité sociale et les Communautés Européennes*'. This article, the first one on this subject, bears witness to the failure to harmonise social security systems in the European construction process and the lack of common objectives. He pleads for a more pragmatic approach by means of an economic and sociological analyses of the real situation. Finally his proposal for a realistic convergence is very close to the current Open Method of Coordination! Another article (Rezeau, 1971) summarises the extension and the contents of bilateral or multilateral agreements on social security rights. The author highlights the role of migrations in international agreements, so totally in contrast to today's concerns. According to Rezeau (1971, p.324), the objectives of international agreements is to '*obtain, from a migration country, the workforce which is necessary for our economy:*

- *competition between the immigration countries when they welcome workers from the same emigration countries;*
- *installing families of the foreign workers in France;*
- *incenting the come back of the foreign retirees or of the handicapped;*
- *Measuring the extension risks of the advantages reserved to the countries included in the bilateral agreements to other ones'*

Despite the difference between the articles, they share certain common ideas: the differentiated advantages between countries; the differences in the organisation of social security systems especially regarding the health services; the balance between the redistribution aspects of the social security systems and the need for workforce mobility as well as the necessary rules of coordination between countries.

Whatever the quality of these articles, we must conclude by again stating the fact they were published in a period of a quasi absence of interest in the international aspects of social security. The consequences of the principle of subsidiarity on the national social rights of the migrant workers in Europe are not analysed in the Review. The comparison to the Belgian production of articles is striking. All the Belgian Issues contain articles on European (the European Coal and Steel Community, European Communities) or international (ILO) bodies.

Part 3: From 1980 to today: a large and new international openness

The increase in the number of articles on foreign social security systems dates from the late Sixties, but it is not until the eighties that we note a permanent and prolific production of articles in the Review that attains the same level as the first period. In 1985, a special Issue was published on the Swiss social policy: *Dix ans de politique sociale en Suisse (1975-1985): un modèle vulnérable*. This Issue is a starting point in the resumption of RFAS policy. This change can be explained by several factors. The most important factor involves the new concerns surrounding the sustainability of the French social protection model in the wake of growing unemployment and the emergence of “new poverty” in the seventies. French society is questioning the efficiency of the system in tackling new social risk factors. Furthermore, this new trend is not located only in France but appears to be at least a European problem. Therefore, the policy makers are increasingly interested in understanding other social welfare systems. Besides this key factor of change, the resumption of RFAS publication policy is also stimulated by the small but real competition with other Reviews. In France, *Droit Social*, *Revue de Droit Sanitaire et Social* are two other Reviews which publish articles containing an international dimension. In the nineties, the Ministry for Social Affairs and its department *Mission Recherche Expérimentation* (MIRE), organised many international conferences focused on the comparison between France and other European countries (a comparison between France and the UK in 1994, between France and Germany in 1995, between France and the Southern countries in 1996 and between France and the Nordic countries in 1998). All the papers of these conferences were published in two languages as a specific publication from the MIRE. MIRE also organised a research programme and an international conference on the social protection in the Eastern European countries in 1996, with a publication in the *Revue d'Études Comparatives Est/Ouest* (vol.29, n°3). The statistical department of the Ministry (DREES) also published comparative data on the social protection in Europe in 1999. Even if the RFAS did not publish these papers, its publication policy was influenced by this new systematic dimension and by the proximity between MIRE and RFAS. The last significant influence is through the new European initiatives. In the eighties and the nineties, The European Commission, especially the DG Employment and Social Affairs launched publications with a comparative approach. This DG created several observatories on family policies, national policies against social exclusion, on the aged and two groups of experts focused their research on supplementary pensions and on minimum incomes. A European experimental policy called *Poverty plans* was organised by this DG and by the member states, and lasted until 1994. MISSOC publishes tables of comparative information on the national systems.

Within this context of a European and international interest in social policies, RFAS adopts a publishing policy that is diametrically different from the two previous periods (which seem to be totally forgotten) and which largely converges with the Belgian Review. The articles are often based on general ideas, on comparative methodologies, on the foundations of social policies, rather than the previous neutral presentation of rules. Furthermore, they do not try to systematically provide the most recent international news.

3.1 Analysis of changes in the developed countries and in the European construction

The articles reflect the deep and long-term changes in society and economy in the developed countries. The criticism against steady economic growth, the increase in unemployment and ‘new’ poverty generate certain inadequacies within the national social security systems. Demographical changes (a decline in the fertility rate, growing life expectancy), intergenerational de-cohabiting, increasing divorce and monoparentality are modifying the

structure of the family. At the same time, the ageing process is de-stabilising the financing balance of the system. New social risks such as dependency among the aged, poverty or social exclusion (Lenoir, 1974, Stoleru 1975) are new concerns in social protection. Indeed, the social security system is gradually becoming an economic challenge. The consequence is that some articles focus on reforms being carried out in other countries. For instance, the special Issue of RFAS on the Nordic countries (RFAS, 2003) is called '*Ajustements, transformations au cours des années quatre-vingt-dix*'.

This openness is also fuelled by the gradual enlargement of the European Community. In 1957, after the Treaty of Rome, the EC comprised only 'Bismarckian' countries. Enlargement has brought a diversification in the social welfare systems within the Community i.e., by the admission of the Great Britain, Ireland and Denmark in 1973, the Southern countries (Greece in 1981, Spain and Portugal in 1986), other Nordic countries (Finland and Sweden) and Austria in 1995 and, more recently, the post-communist countries. This enlargement has also increased the diversification because the rule of subsidiarity maintains national competency within the area of social security.

The RFAS publication policy takes into account all these changes but does not try to systematically provide information on the new developments in these countries, such as the Belgian Review for instance. More and more frequently written by researchers, the articles, focus on explaining the reforms rather than merely describing the new rules. Sometimes they are published several years after the reforms. For example, two articles on the National Health Service reform (1990) were published ... in 2000 (Contandriopoulos J. and Grignon J., 2000).

3.2 In search of models

The second characteristic of the third period is the reference to social welfare models. The notion of new models was largely diffused by the publication of a book written by Stoleru, in 1974, on the experiment of the negative income tax experiment conducted in the US. However, RFAS published articles on foreign "models" only in 1985, in the special Issue on the Swiss security system. This reference to models comprises two different approaches. The first one consists of a "positive" description of a foreign country. The US system is often analysed either in the positive sense, by liberal authors, or in the negative sense (critical analysis). This model is often opposed to the Nordic models which has gradually become a kind of ideal type of system. Specific foreign social policies are also analysed in a new way, as a reference for future French reforms. For example, two articles analyse the long-term services for the frail elderly in Germany (1994) and the policy of Luxemburg (1999). More recently, a special RFAS Issue on handicaps was inspired by the debates surrounding the French legislation of 2005 (RFAS, 2005, n°2).

The other type of model derives from the classification of national systems (Palier, 2002: 27). The most well-known one is the opposition between the Bismarckian and the Beveridgian models. In the nineties the Esping Andersen classification (liberal, corporatist or Nordic regimes) has become the international reference despite its many critics. This means that the articles on foreign social welfare systems study not only the rules but also the changes in the foundations, the principles or the doctrines of the systems.

3.3 The diversity of academic disciplines and authors

The third feature of the period is the new type of author and academic discipline. In this third period the large majority of authors are professors in the university or researchers. In the first period, the authors were mainly administrative executives or policy makers in areas of social protection. Their professional skillfulness was based on their previous education from certain

postgraduate schools or from the Faculties of law and political sciences. However, in the eighties and nineties, the process of diversification in the French universities, the creation of new research centres specialising in social protection, the new international conferences on social protection by the Ministry for Social Affairs (MIRE) the development of national and European research programmes in this domain and new specialised Journals, all these trends have helped forge a new national and international scholar community that carries out research on social protection. This process is largely illustrated by RFAS articles written by foreign researchers (Atkinson, van Parijs, Kautto, Kvist, etc.).

This trend has also renewed the analysis due to the reference to new disciplines. In the first and second periods, the articles were mainly based on two disciplines i.e. law and medicine. In the third period, the new research programmes in France often imposes the interdisciplinarity of the group of researchers towards new disciplines: sociology, economics and political sciences. This disciplinary extension has changed the style and the content of the articles. The analysis of social protection focus on the consistency of the reforms, between the doctrines, the new social rights and the financing scheme. The articles contain elements about the efficiency of the social policies, about the real behaviour of the family when faced with new social benefits, etc.

3.4 Development of special Issues and comparative analysis

The new publication policy of RFAS has developed the number of special thematic Issues (Annex 3). From 1980 to 2004, 62 percent of the articles on the international aspects of social protection were published in special Issues. This trend is not a specific national one. The Belgian Review has also experienced the same change which is really an international one largely related to the extension of international conferences on social protection. Furthermore an introduction in these Issues explains the objectives of the publication which are very often on the look out for new international knowledge, a better understanding of the French system and, of course, for the creation of new policies or national reforms.

We can distinguish two types of articles in these special Issues. Some of them focus on the SWS of one or several countries (Switzerland, Nordic countries, US). Other Issues focus on one benefit or social right (minimum income, the incapacitated, duties) and a comparison between different countries. The main area of the international articles still covers health entitlements and the organisation of the health services (nearly 50 percent of the articles). Other areas include family policies in foreign countries, pensions and unemployment benefits.

Whatever the type of country or social policy, the growing number of international articles published in RFAS has stimulated the methods of international comparative analysis in this domain. In 1990, J.C. Barbier published an article which was totally focused on the methodological problems in the comparative analysis on family policies in Europe: the statistical heterogeneity of data, the language difficulties, the differences between the national institutions (an absence of equivalent institutions), the problem of national ethnocentrism and cultural differences between countries. The articles in RFAS are increasingly based on international comparisons and have simultaneously taken into account these methodological problems such as the translation between different languages. These linguistic concerns clearly appeared in the publication of papers from the MIRE international conferences in the nineties (1994-1998). Under the supervision of Bruno Palier, the Ministry for Social Affairs (MIRE), published a bilingual glossary of French terms and English terms used in social protection and industrial relations and described in both languages.

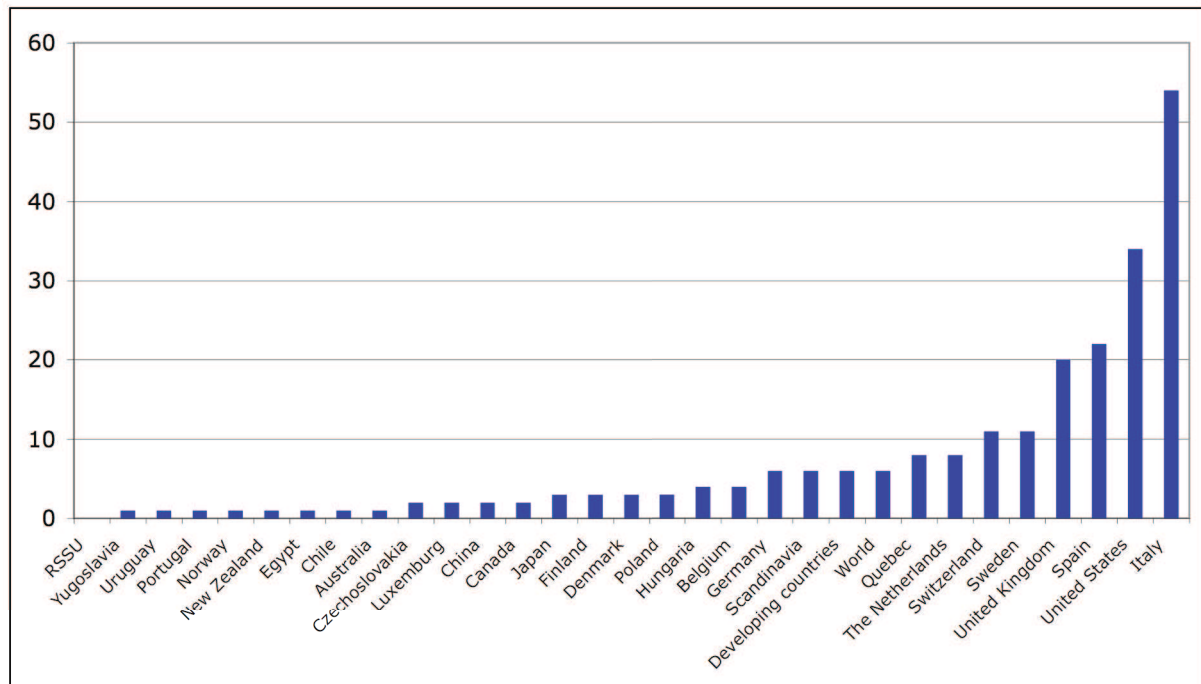
The best carried out Issue featuring an international comparison (RFAS, 2003, n°4). compared the welfare states in the Nordic countries and France This Issue is the continuation of the former MIRE Conferences of the nineties and the result of a Conference in Paris in

2003. In this Issue, the comparison is not only between France and the Nordic countries but also a comparison between the Nordic countries themselves. The introduction of this Issue again points to the permanent methodological difficulties pertaining to comparison.

3.5 Focus on the European countries but... without Europe.

The numerous international articles in RFAS after 1980 are also characterised by a change in the countries being studied. Contrary to the first period which published articles on different countries in the world, this new period narrows the range of countries down to the European ones, with the exception of the United States which has been a constant subject of interest (Annex 2).

Figure 2 Frequency of foreign countries in the articles of the RFAS



Source: Annex 2

This targeting of countries is not at all random. The comparison between European countries is not only based on a cross fertilisation of knowledge about the national systems, but also on a more or less explicit idea of convergence between European countries. This theme of convergence firstly appeared in two Issues in 1989 and 1990. The later Issue is entitled “*Politiques sociales en Europe: quelles convergences?*” (RFAS, 1990, n°3). The articles in these RFAS Issues waver between two ideological positions, between the convergence of countries within a new European social model or, the constrained bottom race towards a liberal model. In 1999, a new RFAS Issue again published articles on the theme of convergence. M. Burdillat and C. Daniel (1999, n°3-4, p.7) describe the different dimensions of the convergence: a constrained liberal model, similar financial constraints in the developed countries, the public wish for integration into a European social welfare system, similarities between the demographical and economic trends in Europe, which would entailed some similarity among the national social policies. In 2003, the special Issue on the Nordic countries was based on the same idea. In the introduction, Strobel writes (RFAS, 2003, n°4, p. 7): ‘*the existence of the Nordic countries, relatively homogeneous, efficient and which is sustainable faced with the events, turns them into an attractive model*’.

However, the recent enlargement of the European Union towards the Baltic, Central and Eastern countries is characterised by a divergent process. For instance, the Human Development Index (HDI) shows that each stage of enlargement is characterised by the integration of poorer countries than the previous poorest country in the European Union. Despite a first analysis of the social protection in the Central and Eastern European countries by the MIRE in 1996 (but not published by RFAS), the Review has not published any article on this divergent process which has been created by the most recent waves of enlargement.

We have noted some similarity of publication policy in the French and the Belgian Reviews. However there remains an area with marked differences: The European Community and the European Union. The RFAS articles on European social policies from the Commission are not totally absent but very limited. In the late eighties and the nineties, the DG Employment and Social Affairs initiated many actions: the creation of a Community charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers in 1989, the creation of several Observatories (family policy (1989), social exclusion (1990, aged people (1992)), the creation of groups of experts (supplementary pensions (1989), minimum resources (1991)), two recommendations on the sufficient resources (1992 and the convergence of objectives (1992), etc. We have found only nine articles on a variety of themes, mainly published between 1985-1995:

- ‘*Sécurité sociale et relations internationales*’ (Bonnet, 1985)
- ‘*Les aspects familiaux de la politique sociale de la Communauté européenne*’, (Laroque, 1987)
- ‘*Réflexions sur l’espace social européen*’ (Riflet, 1989),
- - ‘*Un système de retraite européen : une utopie réalisable ?*’ (Albouy et Kessler, 1989),
- ‘*Vers l’Europe de la santé : de l’Europe des marchands à l’Europe des citoyens*’ (Leclerc, 1989),
- - ‘*La politique familiale européenne en construction*’ (Rosenczweig, 1991),
- ‘*La protection sociale complémentaire dans l’intégration européenne*’ (Duriez et Lequet, 1993),
- ‘*Le revenu minimum en Europe. Quelles perspectives pour un projet communautaire de lutte contre l’exclusion ?*’ (Goujon, 1994).
- ‘*L’impact de la jurisprudence de la Cour de justice des Communautés européennes en matière d’égalité de traitement hommes-femmes sur la qualification des régimes de retraites*’, (Muller, 2002).

In spite of the dramatic rise in international articles in the RFAS, we are compelled to note a lack of interest in European institutions. There remains a striking difference in comparison to the RBSS. For example, the *Revue Belge de Sécurité Sociale* has published a number of celebrated Issues on European social protection scenarios:

- the “*Serpent social*” [Social Snake] which was inspired from the monetary serpent (two specific Issues by Dispersen et al. 1990, 1992)
- - the “*Treisième État*” [Thirteen State], for the social protection of migrant workers in the Community (one Issue by Pieters et al., 1990)
- the “*Fonds de stabilisation*” et le “*Fonds de solidarité active*” for re-structuring European transfers (one special Issue by Pochet P. et al., 1998).

In France, not one article in RFAS mentions the two EC Recommendations (1992) on sufficient resources and the convergence of objectives. More recently, the Open Method of Coordination has not been analysed in the French Review. Of course, the principle of subsidiarity can explain and justify this lack of interest in European social welfare institutions

but, to our minds, it is probably due to a general lack of interest in the international institutions as a whole because we can also note the small number of articles written, for example, on the role of ILO. This indifference is largely confirmed by the striking difference between the French and Belgian Reviews. The RBSS takes into account not only the European dimension but also the other international dimensions. Is it because of the proximity of the European institutions in Brussels? The size of the countries? Is the publication policy of other national Reviews on social protection closer to the French one than to the Belgian one? All these questions remain pending.

Besides the European countries and the European institutions, one non-European country remains a constant source of articles in RFAS: the United States. This country was absent from the articles of the first period but from the early fifties, there has been a permanent publication on the American social welfare system. Let us cite some of these articles. In 1976, G.F. Rohrllich provided a very detailed analysis on the trend and changes in the American social welfare system. More recently, a large section of an RFAS Issue (RFAS, 2002, n°1) was focused on the same theme: '*For one decade, the US have experienced dramatic changes and reforms in the Health services and the public assistance systems*' (RFAS, 2002, n°1, p.3). The wide diversity of the articles on the US does not lead to any simple conclusion or general point of view. The articles are a mixture of the new knowledge of a system which is no where near the French one, of certain elements of surprise such as the organisation or political decisions which do not correspond to the French system of values, and also critical articles, even containing frank opposition against it.

Conclusion

Having delved into the articles of the *Revue Française du Travail* (1951-1966), and then into the *Revue Française des Affaires Sociales* (since 1967), we can see three periods which reflect change in French society through the publication of articles on the foreign social welfare systems. The differences between the periods clearly show how the Review has been influenced by the social and political context and how comparative analysis has also been understood and used.

On the other hand, the articles do not finally address certain outstanding questions. For instance, some countries are never or rarely analysed: in Europe, Ireland and Austria are never quoted and the developing ones are almost totally ignored. What is the explanation for this oversight? A lack of interest among the researchers in social sciences? Their preference for other Reviews? A publication decision? As previously mentioned, a more complete analysis is required to enlarge such comparative analysis to other similar national Reviews in order to better evaluate the cognitive evolution of the social welfare systems.

Another limitation to the articles comes from the publication policy in RFAS and between the other French Reviews. Our analysis does not take into account the other competitive Reviews and their direct or indirect interrelationship with the RFAS. Is there really competition between them? Is there a hierarchy? A specialisation?

In order to better understand the role of the articles we also need to have insight into the selection process of the articles. We do not know anything about this process.

Finally, we could conclude with one wish: a larger and deeper analysis of the development in publication on social protection which would reveal the changes in the attitudes and perception of each national system.

Annex 1 The *Revue Belge de Sécurité Sociale*

The RBSS was created in 1954, at the same time as the creation of a new ministry: the *Ministère de la Prévoyance Sociale*. The first Issue of the Review provides some information on the publication policy. The short introduction claims that :

- not any institution in Belgium focused its action on a systematic analysis of social protection ;
- the most acclaimed professors in the university, and the most skilled persons in the administrative offices agree to provided articles in the Review;
- the interdisciplinary research is compulsory: law, sociology, economics, financing, etc.

The second feature of this first Issue is to start the publication with an article of Pierre Laroque (*Sécurité sociale et solidarité*) who is one of the masterminds of the French social security system.

In the second Issue (n°3-4), the first article is again from Jacques Doublet, a French author. Furthermore the Issue contains an item on the *Jurisprudence des Assurances sociales coloniales*.

In 1959, the information on the foreign systems of social security is presented in a more systematic framework:

- *articles signés;*
- *Chronique de législation de la sécurité sociale;*
- *Chronique des études sociales et statistiques;*
- *Chronique d'informations internationales de sécurité sociale;;*
- *Le mouvement des idées et des faits.*

The Review keeps this framework until the early nineties.

Several features explain the huge difference between the French and Belgian Reviews. Firstly almost all the Issues of the RBSS contain at least one article on a foreign system. For example, in 1960, the annually published articles index gathers 35 articles on foreign systems, mainly on European countries (Germany, Luxemburg, France, etc.). In fact these articles seem to be close to the French publications of the first period. Secondly, the articles are full of international institutions: the EEC, the Common market, the European Council, ILO, Benelux, etc. The European decisions are often analysed and commented in many articles. Thirdly, the authors often found the analysis on explicit theoretical references or on doctrines which explain the differences between systems at the international level. However, in the fourth place, the comparative analysis is not paradoxically as developed as we might expect.

In fact, since the eighties, the Belgian Review have experienced the same developments as the French one, that is, a convergence towards the publication of special Issues on social protection, and a growing diversity of approaches: political sciences, economics, etc.

Annex 2 Distribution of articles according to the countries and the periods

	46-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	85-89	90-94	95-99	00-04	Total
SSRU													0
Yugoslavia	1												1
Uruguay	1												1
Portugal	1												1
Norway							1						1
New Zealand	1												1
Egypt		1											1
Chile											1		1
Australia	1												1
Czechoslovakia	1									1			2
Luxemburg					1						1		2
China												2	2
Canada	1							1				0	2
Japan						1				2			3
Finland						1						2	3
Denmark												3	3
Poland	3												3
Hungaria	1									3			4
Belgium	1	1			1						1		4
Germany	1					3				1	1		6
Scandinavia								1	1	1		3	6
Developing countries					2		2	1			1		6
World						1		3	1		1		6
Quebec						1	2	1	1		1	2	8
The Netherlands			1		1				1	2	2	1	8
Switzerland								2	9				11
Sweden	1					1		1			1	7	11
United Kingdom	4		1		1	2	2	4	1	1		4	20
Spain	2					1	2			16	1		22
United States			2	2		2	3	3	3	3	8	8	34
Italy	4	1			2	3	3	8	3	19	1	10	54
Total	25	3	5	2	8	16	15	25	20	48	20	42	227

Annex 3 Thematic RFAS Issues

Year	N°	Title	Themes	Authors
1985	4	Dix ans de politique sociale en Suisse (1975-1985) : un modèle vulnérable ? Spécificités helvétiques	7 articles : housing, employment, health	Conference
1989	SI	[Sans titre]	11 articles	
1990	3	Les politiques sociales en Europe : quelles convergences ?	9 articles : transnational, minimum incomes, pensions, ageing, family	Conference
1991	3	Un enjeu de société pour l'Europe, la petite enfance.	4 articles	
1991	SI	Revenu minimum et pauvreté en Europe du Sud : France, France, France. Actes du colloque des 7, 8 et 9 June 1990. Revenu minimum et protection sociale :	12 articles	Conference
1992	1	État providence en Europe centrale	6 articles	
1995	4	Les 50 ans de la sécurité sociale : pourquoi une protection sociale ?	5 articles	Conference
1996	1	Europe sociale	6 articles	MSH-Nantes
1996	3	Les contreparties		
1997	SI	Le vieillissement comme processus. IV Dépendance	2 articles	
1997	3-4	La sécurité sanitaire : enjeux et questions	4 articles	Conference
1998	1	L'intégration des personnes handicapées : quelques éléments de bilan	2 articles	
1998	2	Actes du colloque "L'IGAS 1967-1997". Réforme de l'État et mutation du secteur social : deux enjeux pour la fonction d'inspection	8 articles	Conference
1999	3-4	Les réformes des systèmes de protection sociale : convergences et diversité	9 articles	Conference 1999, Florence
2002	1	Protection sociale aux États-Unis : évaluations, réformes et débats	4 articles	
2003	4	L'État providence nordique : ajustements, transformations au cours des années quatre-vingt-dix	24 articles	Conference 1999, Paris
2005	2	Politiques en faveur des personnes handicapées. Grandes tendances dans quelques pays européens	6 articles	

SI: Special Issue

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